

# Prejudice, bigotry is a 'two-way street'

by Vern Metcalfe  
for the Tundra Times

JUNEAU — Last week the column discussed prejudice, bigotry and other sins — of omission and commissions. I noted that there are no easy solutions other than perhaps the passage of time and what Ernest Gruening once prescribed for the ills confronting Juneau. "A few good funerals will straighten matters out here," he told me circa 1950.

Gruening had in mind what I was once moved to term the "dirty dozen" which is something that my uncle, C.H. Metcalfe, once opined had caused his removal from Juneau to Anchorage. I authored a piece about the "demise" of the dozen and it was published in a Ketchikan monthly late in the 1960s and there are still those here who deny they were among the anonymous heroes of the piece.

The article was "pure fantasy" according to the heading which precluded libel actions and in addition was a spoof of monumental proportions. Today we don't have a dirty or otherwise soiled dozen. We have their heirs and assignees of course but their power over our once tight knit community has diminished.

To return the premise of article one of this two part series. The problems with bigotry and prejudice have been with humanity since (and before) our ancestors emerged from caves and discovered fire. Wars have been fought, and are being fought, over who worships the right gods and which race is superior to another ad nauseam.

As noted in the first column, we are more subtle in all of this than we were some 46 years ago when, at age 18, I arrived in this then mining camp. During my first several weeks here I met a really cute girl, who was 16, and

we went dancing at the plethora of public dances of that era.

I was told by a contemporary who had been born and raised here that "if you keep going out with that Indian, the white girls won't go out with you."

The lady in question decided I didn't measure up and, later, the informant found out that his statement wasn't true. The slight to the Indian girl still rankles me although I never told her about it.

There is a reaction to these kinds of remarks and while many newcomers might be puzzled or even ignorant of what is going on, the Native or part-Native holds the non-Native in contempt as well. In short, it is a two way street which serves no one well. This has been further agitated since the inception of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

One old Southeast Native leader of my acquaintance warned upon the passage of ANCSA that, "it was created so we would fail." This insight has since been confirmed to a degree.

The corporations formed by this action had, in most instances, to hire non-Natives to see them through their infancy and the end result need not be chronicled here. Suffice to say that the aftertaste was bitter in more than one case.

There also have been those who viewed ANCSA as some form of welfare for the Alaska Native. The headlines at the time noted that "40 million acres 'given' to Alaska Natives." No mention made of the fact that the adjudication of the Tlingit and Haida Indians of Alaska land suit had established the judicial precedent that old William Henry Seward got eulchered by Czar Alexander II. You can't sell something you never owned.

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The ANCSA settlement should have read "40 million acres 'returned' to Alaska Natives" and the near \$1 billion was in payment for the remainder of the land involved.

Since the federal government had swallowed up nearly all of Alaska's southeastern land mass with the Tongass National Forest and the Glacier Bay National Monument and since then — under the Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act — grabbed off nearly all of Admiralty Island, the land returned to the Tlingit and Haida people benefitted everyone.

How? The 600,000 or so acres involved brought into private ownership prime timber lands which, in turn, allowed the 12 village-urban corporations plus Sealaska Corporation to survive.

ANCSA has also given numerous young Natives the opportunity through scholarship programs to gain higher education; has opened up economic

opportunities previously denied all but a few; has allowed a renaissance of Native culture, art and pride in their ancestry.

As indicated, all of this hasn't necessarily convinced the 84 or so percent of those non-Natives comprising the rest of the population of the 49th state. The Alaska Native Brotherhood's founders probably would view what has happened over the past 75 years with some amazement and sorrow.

Article one of the Constitution they conceived has not yet been fulfilled but we are getting there inch by inch.

Out of Sealaska's 16,000 shareholders, over 3,000 live in the western part of the state of Washington. Partly because of economic opportunity.

At the ANB/ANS convention one got the impression from those attending from the great Outside that the situation was not of their own doing.

Come the millenium...